



**International Society for Behavioural Ecology meeting
(July 1998, Monterey)
and
International Ornithological Congress
(August 1998, Durban)**

Report from Kate Oddie, recipient James Rennie Bequest Fund, 1998.
ICAPB, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JT.

Dear Committee,

This summer I attended two international conferences with the financial support of the James Rennie Bequest Fund. At both of the conferences I presented work as a poster and acknowledged the help I was receiving from the fund.

I am currently in the second year of my PhD studies at the Institute of Cell, Animal and Population Biology. My project investigates growth of nestling passerine birds and their competitive ability within the nest, especially with regard to their sex. Through this I hope to establish whether male or female offspring outperform each other, given certain conditions during the period of growth, and whether subsequent biases in parental care, or manipulation of the sex ratio by parents, is observed.

Theories of sex allocation have always attracted attention amongst biologists – why most organisms exist in populations comprising equal numbers of males and females has been a long-investigated question. Despite this interest, studies of sex allocation in birds have been neglected due to the difficulties in sexing chicks accurately in the nest. However, recently developed molecular techniques, which I have been using in Edinburgh, allow sexing from DNA extracted from blood samples. The advent of these methods opened up a new area of research and thus my work was received with interest at the conferences. Apart from these conferences being timely in regards to the current scientific environment, they were also well-timed for myself personally, allowing me to meet researchers involved in similar work from all over the world.

I benefited in particular from these conferences in the following ways:

1. My poster was presented at the ISBE during an evening poster session. It was well received; for the whole 3 hour poster session people asked questions about the work, both about the molecular methods I employed and the concepts involved. At the IOC the poster was on display for the duration of the conference.
2. The IOC included a symposium specifically on sex allocation and sex ratio studies which was particularly interesting for me to attend.
3. I was approached at the IOC by a colleague who asked if I would be interested in writing a paper with him about sex allocation in birds according to the sequence in which eggs were laid, for which he already has collected data. I also discussed a

collaboration with a colleague at Reading University, and it is likely that we will do an experiment together next field season on sex and sequence of laying in tits.

4. Both conferences presented a good opportunity for me to meet with leading academics in my field. This enabled me to find out about their latest research, and I have received manuscripts from colleagues attending both conferences. Earlier this year I published an article about sex allocation in birds which many people came to talk to me about. They were able to then 'put a face to a name' and we had the chance to discuss our ideas in more detail.

Thank you very much for your financial support offered for this trip. The new work and connections, which have arisen from attending these conferences, has made me even more enthusiastic about my study. It has also encouraged me that there are opportunities to proceed in science, which doesn't always seem the case when working on a 'pure science' project such as mine. With the little support from funding bodies which post-grads receive, grants such as the James Rennie bequest fund are extremely important in enabling us to present our work. I hope, therefore that your committee will continue to award grants to support post-grads like myself to attend conferences. We are very grateful for it – thank you!

Yours sincerely,



Kate Oddie.